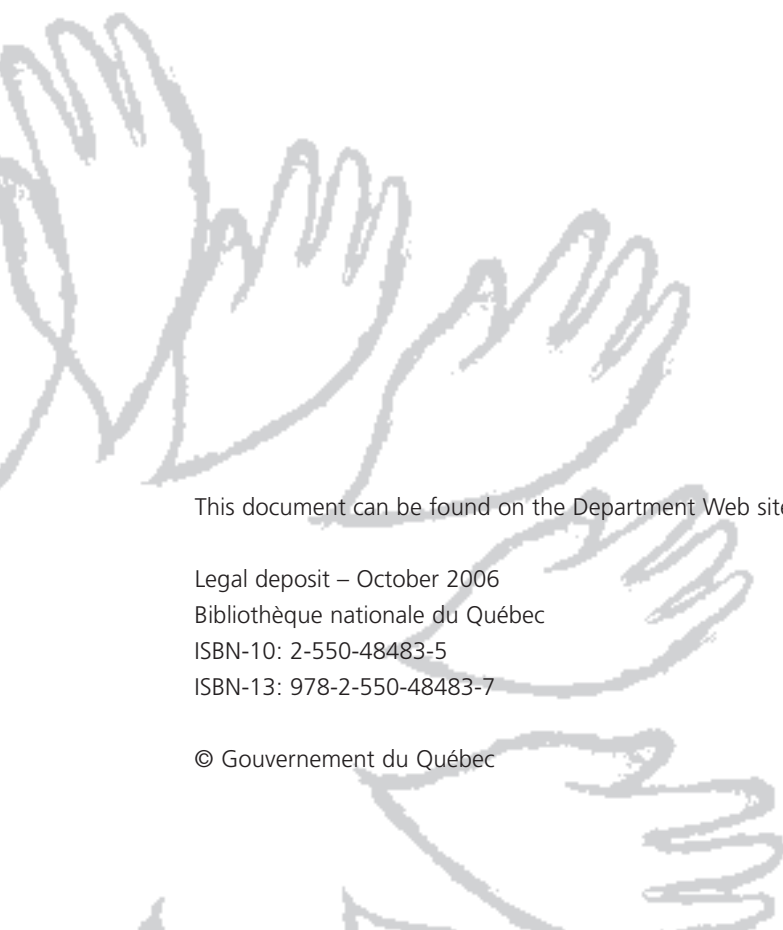


2004-2009
*Government Action Plan
to Combat Poverty
and Social Exclusion*



YEAR TWO REPORT

October 2006



This document can be found on the Department Web site at www.mess.gouv.qc.ca

Legal deposit – October 2006
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
ISBN-10: 2-550-48483-5
ISBN-13: 978-2-550-48483-7

© Gouvernement du Québec

This report was produced by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in collaboration with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation, the Ministère du Travail, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Société d'habitation du Québec and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



Today we are releasing the report on the second year of implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*. This anti-poverty action plan, introduced in April 2004, is based on the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion and arises from the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, legislation that provides direction for government action and engages all of Québec society in the great ten-year challenge of placing Québec among the world's industrialized states with the least poverty and social exclusion.

This objective is feasible but very demanding. It requires the mobilization of every member of our society every day. It is based on the right to live with dignity, decency, and respect, the right to equal opportunity, and on the individual and society-wide responsibility and obligation to do all we can to develop our human potential and our talents so as to overcome life's difficulties.

This Year Two Report describes the main existing measures as well as those instituted between April 2005 and March 2006 by the Government of Québec departments involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Our government is continuing its action aimed at eradicating and preventing poverty, assisting children, countering student disengagement, or dropping-out, acknowledging the value of work, and strengthening partnerships at the service of those unable to enter the labour force in the short-term. We want to help immigrants, women, members of visible minorities and persons with functional limitations to grow and thrive. They too want to live with dignity and aspire to have a hand in developing their community in a manner commensurate with their ambitions.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this document, the result of a determined and systematic approach aimed at finding lasting solutions to these complex phenomena that are unacceptable in a modern and democratic society.

Michelle Courchesne

A stylized, artistic signature of Michelle Courchesne, consisting of a series of connected dots and lines that form her name.

Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

SUMMARY

Presented in April 2004 by the Government of Québec, the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is composed of a set of measures to be implemented within a five-year timeframe in order to meet the objectives enshrined in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The action plan hinges on government and intersectoral involvement that brings together all the players concerned.

Under this Act, the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity must table an annual report on the activities carried out within the framework of the action plan.

This Year Two Report describes the second year of implementation of the action plan.

FORMATION OF THE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF DE LUTTE CONTRE LA PAUVRETÉ ET L'EXCLUSION SOCIALE AND OF THE CENTRE D'ÉTUDE SUR LA PAUVRETÉ ET L'EXCLUSION

Formation of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion figures among the milestone achievements of Year Two. These new deliberative forums will enable social dialogue that should foster the emergence of innovative solutions for waging an effective battle against poverty and social exclusion and contribute to more closely allying the various socioeconomic players in this sizeable challenge.

The Comité consultatif, a group that represents stakeholders from all sectors of civil society, is a place of exchange, deliberation, and joint and coherent action targeting complex issues in the fight against poverty. Its main mission is to advise the Minister on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the action introduced under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. This advisory committee is made up of 17 members appointed by the government, five of whom represent anti-poverty groups or organizations. At least three of these five members must also be people with whom these groups or organizations work. Ten members are from various sectors of Québec society, and the remaining two members are civil servants.

In addition to the advisory component of the Comité consultatif's mission is its mandate to monitor government policies that have an impact on poverty and social exclusion. It is also empowered to follow developments in the communities affected by those problems. The Comité consultatif therefore maintains ongoing contact with the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion in order to have access to the indicators required in tracking the progress made under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is an observation, research and discussion centre entrusted with providing reliable and objective information on poverty and social exclusion. Its main purpose is to provide the Minister with a series of indicators to be used for measuring poverty and social exclusion, and social and economic disparities, such as income, as well as other determinants of poverty. The Centre will follow up on the indicators chosen by the Minister to measure the strides made, particularly with regard to improving the economic and social situation of people and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Under the aegis of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is managed by a steering committee composed of members of the government, academic and research communities whose knowledge of poverty and social exclusion is recognized, as well as two workers in the field of poverty and social exclusion.

Changes to employment assistance

Assented to in June 2005, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act* favours incentives rather than coercion by more strongly supporting social integration and labour market participation efforts. This piece of legislation has made it possible to institute many action plan measures:

- a basic benefit that abolishes decreases enforced for failure to take steps leading to employment, including refusing or giving up a job
- more flexible eligibility conditions governing temporarily limited capacity for employment in order to broaden access to families with dependent children with a disability, even if the children are full-time students
- the Devenir program, aimed at providing recipients with individualized support in helping them to undertake initiatives leading to their active participation within society and to adequately prepare for an employability assistance measure.

In light of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, certain rules governing employment assistance were changed or relaxed:

- allowable savings of up to \$5000 in an individual development account earmarked for a specific project
- increases in the allowable exemptions for certain assets, notably, the net value of a residence, which rose from \$80,000 to \$90,000
- exemption of child-support income of \$100 a month for all eligible families with dependent children
- benefits indexed by 2.43% in January 2006 for recipients with a severely limited capacity for employment and by 1.21% for persons fit to work.

NEW EFFORTS AND RENEWED EFFORTS

Financial assistance and housing assistance

- In May 2006, the minimum wage went from \$7.60 to \$7.75 an hour, and from \$6.85 to \$7 an hour for workers with income from tips.
- Advance payments under the Work Premium program meant that five times more families benefited than under the Parental Wage Assistance (PWA) program in 2004. In 2005, 54,099 families received advance payments under the Work Premium program.
- From June 2005 to March 31, 2006, some 600 immigrants or members of visible minorities were assisted under the Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi.
- In 2005-2006, 4,519 resource region workers who underwent collective dismissal were assisted. Furthermore, outside the resource regions, 1,931 textile and clothing sector workers who underwent collective dismissal were also assisted.
- \$3.4 million was spent on food security for certain segments of the population.
- During the 2006-2007 Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance announced the addition of new monies earmarked for constructing 1,400 housing units in addition to the 18,600 others planned under the AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs. The target for social and community housing is now 20,000 by 2008.

- In 2005-2006, approximately 4,100 emergency housing supplements were granted.
- Since July 2005, seniors who receive the maximum Guaranteed Income Supplement benefit receive free medication.
- More people now have access to legal aid.

Prevention of poverty and social exclusion

- Poor families now receive Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services through two poverty-prevention components: Soutien aux jeunes parents (support for young families) and Soutien aux familles vivant dans l'extrême pauvreté (support for families in extreme poverty).
- Under the Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities, more than 1,400 literacy activities were carried out with parents, children 5 years old and younger, and social groups.
- 6,299 students in 25 schools in disadvantaged communities and 12 adult education centres were reached under the Programme famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble.
- The Homework Assistance program budget has been doubled (\$9.4 million in 2004-2005 to \$19.6 million in 2005-2006).
- The \$90 million cash injection used to provide students with disabilities or learning or adaptation disorders with better guidance and supervision and faster intervention brings the additional amounts dedicated to this clientele to \$120 million for 2004-2005 to 2008-2009.
- In the 2005 calendar year, nearly \$2 billion was paid out through a Child Assistance refundable tax credit, a \$550 million increase from 2004 figures. The average annual benefit for all eligible households was \$2274 and \$3176 for families with income of less than \$25,000.
- In 2005-2006, funds were allocated for training and maintaining youth intervention teams in every region of Québec.
- In order to offer training and support services tailored to the situation and needs of drop-outs and young people with a low level of schooling aged 16 to 24, 24 local teams bringing together nearly 300 organizations were formed.
- The Agir autrement intervention strategy for secondary schools in the most disadvantaged communities made it possible to reach nearly 114,000 students.
- In order to provide alternatives to last-resort assistance for young people under age 25, since May 2006 the Alternative jeunesse pilot project has been underway in nine local employment centres. The program is one of the centrepieces of the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy made public in March 2006.

Involving society as a whole

- The Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions has committed to extending the Programme de renouveau urbain et villageois à Montréal until December 31, 2006.
- Pilot projects on local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion continue in the regional county municipalities (RCMs) of La Haute-Gaspésie and Témiscouata and the City of Montréal (22 boroughs).

Consistent and coherent action

- When making proposals to Government, government departments and agencies must report on the direct and significant impacts of draft legislation on the incomes of individuals or families in situations of poverty. Where applicable, the report must be appended to the briefs presented to the Conseil des ministres.
- Further to talks between the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, an agreement was signed in December 2005. Its purpose was to work with Native communities, in keeping with their culture, to craft and introduce means of combating poverty and social exclusion. The social development office of the health and social services commission of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador was tasked to produce an action plan adapted to Native peoples.

YEAR THREE

Year three will focus primarily on the work of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion. In early 2007, the Comité consultatif will produce a brief on updating of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. For its part, the Centre, in collaboration with the Comité consultatif, will suggest a series of poverty and social exclusion indicators.

In addition, the work related to an integrated territorial approach will continue in order to help local and regional communities design anti-poverty strategies. Certain changes will also be made to employment assistance in the aftermath of the upcoming adoption of the *Regulation respecting individual and family assistance*. Lastly, the First Nations will continue working on the production of an action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion consistent with their culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	13
1. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE YEAR-ONE REPORT	15
2. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN YEAR TWO	17
2.1 Improve the lives of people living in poverty	18
2.2 Prevent poverty and social exclusion by fostering development of personal potential	25
2.3 Foster the involvement of society as a whole	32
2.4 Ensure consistent and coherent action	34
3. OUTLOOKS	37
CONCLUSION	43



INTRODUCTION

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion was made public in April 2004. It arises from the adoption in December 2002 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The measures provided for in this action plan are aimed at attacking the causes and consequences of poverty alike in order to achieve the primary goal of the Act, namely, to make Québec one of the industrialized states with the least number of poor.

In accordance with this statute, an annual report presenting the activities carried out under the government action plan must be tabled with the Government by the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity. Here, therefore, is the report describing Year Two of implementation of the action plan.

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion assembles a set of measures for enabling movement towards achievement of the goals enshrined in the Act within a five-year timeframe. There are four major thrusts of these measures:

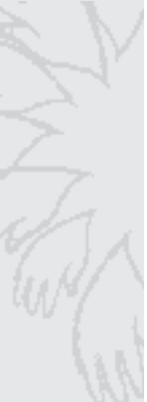
- Improves the lives of people living in poverty
- Prevent poverty and social exclusion by fostering development of personal potential
- Foster the involvement of society as a whole
- Ensure consistent and coherent action.

The action plan hinges on government and intersectoral involvement that brings together all the players working on the anti-poverty and social exclusion front. This is why, under the aegis of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, an interdepartmental committee was formed in June 2004 to effect true mobilization of the stakeholders and consistent and coherent implementation of action plan measures. In addition to Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale representatives are representatives from the following government departments and agencies: the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Ministère du Travail, the Société d'habitation du Québec and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.

During Year Two, the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion were established and commenced their mandate. Everything is now in place for action resolutely geared towards attaining the goals of the Act.

The action plan comes at a time when the conditions for entering the workforce and keeping a job are good. This, of course, means that implementation will be easier since one of the plan's two driving principles is that employment is the number one solution for ensuring the economic security and inclusion of individuals. Recent years have seen a drop in the jobless rate and a rise in the number of jobs. From August 2003 to August 2006, the unemployment rate decreased from 10% to 7.9%, to reach its lowest level since 1976, and the number of jobs increased by 155,000. The job creation and workforce renewal predicted for the next few years should, among its many effects, cause the jobless rate to retreat even further.

According to Emploi-Québec forecasts, some 250,000 jobs will be created in Québec from 2005 to 2009 as a result of economic growth, in combination with a particularly high labour force replacement demand.



Section 1 is a short summary of the Year One Report. Section 2 presents action taken or built upon in Year Two (fiscal 2005-2006). Lastly, Section 3 provides an overview of what to expect in Year Three.

Note that this report deals primarily with initiatives under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. It does not touch on all the action undertaken either by the government or its partners to make Québec a society where every citizen counts and actively contributes to the common good.

1. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE YEAR ONE REPORT

In 2004-2005, each of the main goals of the action plan were addressed, with initiatives covering various aspects of the fight against poverty and social exclusion or particular target groups.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE VALUE OF WORK

In Year One of action plan implementation, a slate of measures was introduced to help people gain access to the labour market and to encourage them to remain within it, notably, guidance and follow-up to employment-assistance recipients fit for work in their steps towards employment; introduction of the Work Premium; an increase in the minimum wage in May 2004 and May 2005; and the Income Support Program for Workers Affected by Collective Dismissals in the Resource Regions.

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Access to decent and affordable housing is another way of bettering the lives of persons in situations of poverty. This is why the target for the construction of social and community housing was upped to 18,600. In keeping with the action plan, approximately 3,700 emergency housing supplements were granted in 2004-2005 for low-income households most at risk of being homeless because of the housing shortage. Investments were also made for adapting housing units occupied by persons with disabilities and for carrying out community action projects.

FAMILY SUPPORT

More generous financial assistance was granted to low-income families, notably under Child Assistance. Other monies were allocated for supporting young parents, mainly in the form of financial aid to destitute pregnant teenagers and in Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services.

As for prevention, signature of a five-year partnership agreement with the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon led to formation of a not-for-profit corporation mandated primarily to provide prompt intervention for pregnant women and first-time families in disadvantaged communities.

An array of activities to enhance student success in poorer communities continued: emergent literacy activities; testing of a template for an education community that fosters student success at the elementary level; and the Homework Assistance and Écoles en forme et en santé programs.

Specialists were also hired to assist students having academic difficulties.

YOUTH SUPPORT

The various existing projects aimed especially at the social and vocational integration of young people experiencing difficulties continued, notably, youth intervention teams, a back-to-school assistance program for people aged 16 to 24, the Agir autrement intervention strategy for disadvantaged communities, and testing of different formats for combining work and school that enable young employment-assistance recipients to get entry-level qualifications while working full-time.

COHERENT ACTION AND INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

Efforts were made to step up exchange with the federal government. This resulted in the Québec Parental Insurance Plan. Talks were also held with the First Nations to support the emergence of local anti-poverty strategies in villages and on reservations.

A number of social and community development projects in communities with a heavy concentration of poverty were funded under the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales, notably through integrated urban renewal, food security, and public transit. A method for quicker identification of legislative or regulatory proposals with direct and significant impacts on the income of persons in situations of poverty was developed. Lastly, work was begun to establish the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion.

2. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN YEAR TWO

This chapter describes the main action carried out under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in Year Two of its implementation.

First is the creation of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, among the most important achievements of Year Two of implementation of the plan and proof of the determination to meet the objectives of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. These new deliberative forums will enable social dialogue that should foster the emergence of innovative solutions for waging an effective battle against poverty and social exclusion and contribute to more closely allying the various socioeconomic players in this sizeable challenge.

The Comité consultatif, instituted by the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, is a group that represents stakeholders from all sectors of civil society and a place of exchange, deliberation, and joint and coherent action targeting complex issues in the fight against poverty. Its main mission is to advise the Minister on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the action introduced under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Composed of 17 members, 15 of whom have a vote, the Comité consultatif reflects Québec's geographic and demographic diversity. Its members represent groups or organizations involved in the movement to combat poverty and social exclusion and predominantly include persons directly concerned by this action, as well as various sectors of Québec society. The members of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale were appointed by government order in council on March 8, 2006.

In addition to the advisory component of the Comité consultatif's mission is its mandate to monitor government policies that have an impact on poverty and social exclusion. It is also empowered to follow developments in the communities affected by those problems. The Comité consultatif therefore maintains ongoing contact with the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion in order to have access to the indicators required in tracking the progress made on this front.

The Comité consultatif will focus on defining income improvement targets for people in situations of poverty and on finding the most effective means for reaching these targets, so that, by 2013, Québec will be well on its way to being an industrialized state with the least number of poor, in keeping with the stated purpose of the Act.

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is an observation, research and discussion centre entrusted with providing reliable and objective information on poverty and social exclusion. Its main purpose is to provide the Minister with a series of indicators to be used for measuring poverty and social exclusion, and social and economic disparities, such as income, as well as other determinants of poverty.

The Centre will follow up on the indicators chosen by the Minister to measure the strides made, particularly with regard to improving the economic and social situation of people and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, in conjunction with the Institut de la Statistique du Québec, has published two complementary documents. The first, *Inventaire des indicateurs de pauvreté et d'exclusion sociale*,¹ examines the many ways of defining and measuring poverty-related phenomena. The second, *Recueil statistique sur la pauvreté et les inégalités socioéconomiques au Québec*,² is a compendium of data on the standard indicators used in the field, taken from the Inventaire.

Another of the roles of the Centre is to conduct qualitative and quantitative research aimed at improving knowledge of poverty and social exclusion, with the assistance of experts and other players should the need arise. The Centre is also required to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to various social groups engaged in the fight against poverty or social exclusion, in collaboration with the government departments and agencies concerned and the field's various research communities in Québec and elsewhere in the world.

Le Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion answers to the Direction de la recherche et de l'analyse prospective of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. It is managed by a steering committee composed of members of the academic and research communities (six), the government (three), and workers in the field of poverty and social exclusion (two). The role of the committee is primarily to establish the Centre's aims, objectives, policies and action plans. It is also entrusted with assessing the relevance and scientific quality of the Centre's research programs and projects and prioritizing them.

2.1 Improve the lives of people living in poverty

This component consists of providing support to persons in situations of poverty through short-term assistance for their food or housing needs or through direct financial assistance. It also includes assistance and incentives for gaining financial self-sufficiency in the medium-term through job entry and retention.

For employment-assistance recipients, Year Two of the action plan featured implementation of several income-enhancement measures. Cases in point are the increase in the minimum wage and the Work Premium, both of which help better the financial situation of low-income workers and give them reason to stay employed. In addition, major investments were made or pledged in the area of affordable housing, in line with expenditures already entered in government ledgers.

Lastly, measures that were not part of the initial action plan were added, such as higher eligibility notches for legal aid and an array of measures for helping low-income households cope with the rising cost of electricity.

CHANGES TO EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

Designed to build on the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*, assented to in June 2005, favours incentives rather than coercion by more strongly supporting social integration and labour market participation efforts.

1. MORASSE, Julie Alice (2005). *Inventaire des indicateurs de pauvreté et d'exclusion sociale*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec and Ministère de l'Emploi et de la solidarité sociale, 94 pp.

2. MORIN, Alexandre (2006). *Recueil statistique sur la pauvreté et les inégalités socioéconomiques au Québec*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec and Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, 134 pp.

Under this Act, in October 2005, a basic benefit was introduced. In concrete terms, the basic benefit does away with the penalties imposed for refusing to take steps to enter the workforce, including turning down or giving up a job.

It also, among other things, provides protection for 50% of the financial amount to which recipients are entitled. In other words, this basic benefit cannot be withheld by way of payment of a debt towards the Department. The basic benefit translates into investments of \$10.2 million a year.

Since January 1, 2006, the rules governing eligibility for temporarily limited capacity for employment allowances have been relaxed, thereby broadening access to families with dependent children with a disability, even if the children are full-time students. This will mean additional outlays in the order of \$0.7 million a year.

Social support programs may also be created under the Act. The programs are optional and a support allowance of \$130 a month can be added to the employment-assistance benefits of participants. The first of such programs, Devenir, is aimed at providing recipients with individualized support in helping them undertake initiatives leading to their active participation within society, adequately prepare for an employability assistance measure, and widening their opportunities for entering the job market.

The involvement of community organizations in Devenir is crucial because they file the proposals for specific projects required for admission to the program. Devenir began on May 1, 2006. By early September, 67 agreements had been signed with various organizations, for a total of 220 participants.

In light of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, in January 2006 changes were made to the rules for calculating assets for employment-assistance purposes in order to foster self-sufficiency. Recipients can now amass savings of up to \$5000 without having their benefits reduced or cancelled if the savings are earmarked for training activities, self-employment, business start-up, or purchase of work-related equipment or instruments. This measure means investments in the vicinity of \$0.5 million annually.

On September 1, 2006, the allowable exclusion for the net value of a residence rose from \$80,000 to \$90,000. This exclusion also applies to the net value of a farm operation, work-related goods for the self-employed, and certain other movables and immovables.


A \$100-a-month exemption for child-support income has also been granted since January 2006 to all eligible families with dependent children. Prior to this, only families with at least one dependent child under five years old were eligible for the exemption.

The benefits of employment-assistance recipients with severely limited capacity for employment were indexed by 2.43% in January 2006, at par with that applied under the personal taxation system. The benefits of individuals able to work increased by 1.21%. The cost of indexation for 2006 was roughly \$12.1 million in 2005-2006 and will be \$48.5 million in 2006-2007.

Employment measures

- **Increase in the minimum wage**

The purpose of the minimum wage is to ensure that workers in low-paying jobs are fairly remunerated, without hindering employment for workers with few qualifications. In May 2006, the minimum wage went from \$7.60 to \$7.75 an hour, and from \$6.85 to \$7 an hour for workers with income from tips, the third increase in as many years.



Between March 2002 and March 2005, the number of minimum-wage workers dwindled from 209,900 to 118,300, a drop of 44%, while the total number of wage earners moved from 3,025,500 to 3,135,300. Note that 56.5% of minimum-wage earners are 25 years old and under, 55.5% are women, 57.5% work fewer than 30 hours a week, and 55.3% no longer attend school.

- **Work Premium**

The Work Premium, introduced in 2005, is a refundable tax credit that helps make work more appealing and financially worthwhile for low- or middle-income workers. Unlike the PWA program which it replaces, the Work Premium is available to all households, regardless of the value of their assets and whether or not the households include children.

Data on the total number of households that reaped the benefits of the Work Premium in 2005 will be available only in late autumn 2006. What is known, however, is that under the Work Premium, five times more families received advance payments than families under the PWA program did in 2004. The figures are 54,099 families under the Work Premium in 2005, compared with a mere 11,815 families under the Parental Wage Assistance (PWA) program in 2004.

Work Premium amounts are income-based. The maximum amounts for fiscal 2006 are \$512 for independent adults, \$790 for couples, \$2196 for single-parent families, and \$2821 for couples with children.

- **Increased participation in employability assistance measures by the groups most affected by poverty**

Certain segments of society, such as families with young children, workers aged 55 and over, and persons with serious functional limitations, are particularly affected by poverty. Specific support must be provided to help these people overcome the obstacles to their social and vocational integration and financial self-sufficiency.

The wage subsidies and other forms of financial assistance granted under the Programme de subventions aux entreprises adaptées are aimed at helping businesses that offer quality jobs consistent with the needs of persons with disabilities. On April 1, 2006, program management devolved to Emploi-Québec from the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec. This means that the businesses backed by this program now have a vast network of local employment centres in their region to refer workers with a disability.

The intervention strategy for workers aged 45 and over continues. The strategy consists of a set of measures that includes easing of the rules for Emploi-Québec's manpower training measure in order to tailor the pace of training to the needs of older workers. This strategy has helped to increase the active-measure participation of workers aged 55 and over from 15,786 participants in 2003-2004 to 19,862 in 2005-2006.

The evaluation results for certain of Emploi-Québec's active measures, notably Wage Subsidies and Manpower Training, are positive for employment-assistance recipients. According to an evaluation report produced by the the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in 2004, the work income of the people who take part in at least one of the measures analyzed improves by an average of \$2402 in the year after their participation, whereas this increase is only \$858 for recipients who returned to the labour market without taking advantage of the measures. Furthermore, 56% of participating

recipients find a job within 18 months of participation, compared with 35.8% for non-participants.

- **Social and vocational integration of immigrants and members of visible minorities**

Immigrants and members of visible minorities sometimes experience difficulty finding work. This cuts down on their chances for financial self-sufficiency and social integration. To alleviate these problems, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles have produced a series of measures. The interdepartmental agreement signed in May 2004 is valid for three years and contains nine special mechanisms.

One of these is introduction of the Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi. The program is designed to empower immigrants and members of visible minorities to have their true value recognized by the businesses that hire them, and to, as much as possible, help prevent occupational dead-ends that often lead to instability, joblessness and exclusion for them despite their qualifications. From June 2005 to March 31, 2006, 596 people were assisted under the new program and got or kept a job. The standard timeframe for achieving the annual target of at least 650 workers employed for the first time in Québec in their field of study is one year. Projected investments in this program are \$15 million from 2005 to 2008.

Signature of the interdepartmental agreement to foster the labour market entry of immigrants and members of visible minorities also entitled the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles to representation on regional advisory boards of labour market partners and at the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail. This makes it easier for the Department to keep abreast of the special needs of new arrivals and members of visible minorities. Complementary regional agreements to facilitate referral have also been signed.

In order for these new arrivals to fit comfortably into Québec society and foster its social, cultural and economic development, it is crucial that they have jobs commensurate with their qualifications. In December 2005, the work group on recognition of the degrees and competencies of people trained and educated abroad, composed primarily of representatives of professional corporations, college- and university-level establishments, and the government, officially tabled its report. Its recommendations are in the process of being implemented. For example, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has reviewed its rules in order to fund the college-level retraining required of candidates by professional corporations. The Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and its partners have also implemented a number of measures to facilitate access to regulated trades and professions, such as instruments for evaluating skills and experience and production of training tools.

- **Support for Québec's community credit network**

Community credit is a social and economic development tool, with special approaches and practices for creating and sustaining micro-enterprises. People who cannot easily acquire financing through traditional loan mechanisms are provided with seed money for a small business.

The Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire received funding of \$1.18 million in 2005-2006. Its participating members, the nine community funds and the ten lending circles, were also granted \$345,000 in one-off funding.

The clientele of the funds and lending circles is made up largely (55 %) of women. According to the figures available for 2005-2006, there were more than 100 approved loans and 168 projects underway as at March 31, 2006.

The businesses included a dance school, jewellery-making shops, a butcher shop, a traditional costume making shop, and an acupuncture clinic.

- **Support for workers affected by collective dismissals**

Workers affected by collective dismissals in the resource regions received one year's worth of financial relief so that they would not be obliged to deplete their life savings or move away from the region. Under certain conditions, the assistance could be extended by one year. In 2005-2006, 4,519 workers were thus assisted, for a total of \$1.6 million.

Textile and clothing sector industries have been particularly hard hit by the globalization of trade that has prevailed in the past two decades. There is a good chance that the job loss suffered will persist in the coming years as the sector continues to adjust to the new rules of international trade.

The people who work in these industries are relatively old, have modest incomes (the average wage in 2002 was \$11 an hour), and are concentrated outside the resource regions. In times of collective dismissal, they are in particular need of assistance. This is why, in April 2005, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale established the Income Support Program for Workers Affected by Collective Dismissals in the Textile and Clothing Sectors, Excluding the Resource Regions. In fiscal 2005-2006, program expenditures were \$735, 000 and 1,931 workers were granted assistance.

Measures for access to a healthy diet

- **For children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

In 2005-2006, the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec received government support for helping children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods start off their school day with a balanced breakfast. The mission of this organization is to make sure that children from poor neighbourhoods have an equal opportunity for success by serving them nutritious breakfasts. The Club provided breakfasts for more than 10,000 students in 165 elementary schools in poor neighbourhoods. Government disbursements of \$4 million over two years were committed in the agreement signed by the Government of Québec and the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec.

- **Measures for food security for certain segments of the population**

In 2002-2003, in its bid to ensure that certain segments of the population did not go hungry, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux allocated \$10 million to support food security projects. This three-year outlay was distributed among the 18 health and social services agencies so that they, in turn, could fund the projects submitted by community organizations.

The annual amount of \$3.4 million for food security is now a revolving funding. So far, 252 projects have been subsidized in the 18 health regions.

Funded projects include community kitchens, gardens, and food outlets, purchasing cooperatives, and food education groups.

Measures for better access to affordable housing

Housing accounts for a huge portion of household spending, especially for those with low incomes. This is why the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion emphasizes the paramount importance of housing assistance in this offensive.

During the 2006-2007 Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance announced the addition of new monies earmarked for constructing 1,400 housing units in addition to the 18,600 others planned under the AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs. The target for social and community housing is now 20,000 units by 2008. This target has been pushed up three times since 2003, from 13,000 to 20,000 housing units, and the rate speeded up from some 150 to 300 dwellings a month.

Very short-term assistance must also be provided to households unable to find shelter due to the shortage of affordable rental units. In 2005-2006, approximately 4,100 emergency housing supplements worth \$19 million were granted. This included assistance to municipalities to cover a portion of the cost of emergency services. In February 2006, the Government of Québec ratified one-year renewal (until the summer of 2007) of the emergency rental subsidies issued to some 4,100 households. The Government of Québec's contribution is \$15.5 million. When the contribution by the federal government and the participating municipalities is factored in, the total estimated cost is \$19.9 million.

For some citizens, getting to and moving about their apartment is difficult because of their mobility problems or physical disabilities. The cost of adapting their dwelling often far outweighs what they can afford. The Residential Adaptation Assistance Program offers financial assistance for making their dwelling accessible to them and customizing it to their needs.

The program has a recurrent budget of \$4.2 million a year. In 2004-2005, additional appropriations of \$38.8 million over three years were approved for 2,500 extra residential adaptations and for compliance checks and upgrades of platform lifts in dwellings for disabled persons.

As at March 1, 2006, over 900 residential adaptations had been carried out further to announcement of these additional appropriations, plus the 3,140 current files at various stages of processing. For the same period, \$2.9 million was allocated for equipment repair and replacement. Specifications and bids with a cost estimate in the order of \$4.1 million are currently on the table.

Support for community initiatives is delivered via various programs. The Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations provides financial assistance to organizations involved in improving housing conditions and promoting citizen self-empowerment in that regard. In 2005-2006, the program had a budget of \$1.52 million which enabled the operation of 47 community organizations and implementation of projects aimed at developing new community practices, conducting studies and analyses, and carrying out joint housing activities.

The Community and Social Initiatives in Low Rental Housing Program provides funding for community projects aimed at improving life in low-rental housing by empowering residents to take charge of their environment. The purpose of the program is to provide funding for creating a family, community and social life adapted to the needs of the people who live in these subsidized environments and lifestyles that foster the meeting and intermingling of different generations and cultures. From 1998 to 2005, 287 projects for residents of low-rental housing were carried out under this program.

Lastly, within the framework of the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the Société d'habitation du Québec select projects for assisting the homeless or individuals at risk of becoming so. The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Human Resources and Social Development Canada work together to assess the program and have already decided upon the terms and conditions for its extension until March 2007.

Better access to prescribed medication for people with low incomes

Since July 1, 2005, seniors who receive the maximum Guaranteed Income Supplement have been entitled to free prescribed medication. The plan is to extend coverage to other groups in cases where there are savings through agreements with the pharmaceutical industry and to implement ways of promoting better use of medication. A policy will be tabled late in the autumn of 2006.

Measures for cushioning the impact of the increased cost of electricity on low-income households

Given the climbing cost of electricity in Québec in recent years, a committee composed of representatives of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and of the Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune was tasked to ensure that the problem of poverty and social exclusion was taken into account in Québec's energy strategy, Hydro-Québec's strategic plan for 2006-2100, and the government master plan for energy efficiency.

This demand was heeded because Québec's energy strategy for 2006-2015, made public in May 2006, includes several sections dealing with the effects of higher energy costs on low-income households.

More specifically, it allows the Régie de l'énergie to require distributors to provide impact studies on the situation of these households with their applications for rate increases. To give teeth to this course of action, a government order in council makes it mandatory for the Régie de l'énergie, when setting power-distribution rates and conditions, to take into account the government's economic and social concerns as stated in its energy strategy, namely, to consider the situation of low-income households that have trouble paying their energy bills.

In light of this, the Agence de l'efficacité énergétique du Québec must, by January 2007 at the latest, produce a ten-year master plan for energy efficiency. The plan must include an energy savings program for existing homes that provides for improving the thermal envelope of buildings.

The agency currently offers personalized assessments that make it possible for low-income households to trim their electricity bill. Last year, 6,200 households benefited from the agency's Budget modeste program. The target for 2006 is 7,400 households.

Greater access to legal aid

Access to justice is fundamental in a law-based society. People in situations of poverty or with modest incomes must be ensured State assistance if they do not have the financial means for legal services.

The income cut-offs levels entitling applicants to free or low-cost legal aid have not been increased or indexed since 1996. For independent adults, this threshold has not moved since 1981. Last January 26, the cut-off levels were raised for all household categories, and this upward trend will continue yearly until 2010. For example, the threshold for an independent adult has gone from \$8870 in 2005 to \$9695 in 2006. In 2010, it will reach \$12,093.

As of January 1, 2007, cut-off levels will be indexed annually. The new income cut-off levels will make more people eligible for legal aid, either completely free of charge or at low cost. In 2010, the government will spend nearly \$30 million more per year on legal aid.

Note that access to legal aid was not among the measures under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. Since this measure addresses a

number of the goals pursued by the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, it has been added to the action plan.

2.2 Prevent poverty and social exclusion by fostering development of personal potential

To prevent poverty, action must be taken as early as childhood and, in some instances, even during pregnancy, through specific programs intended for children from families living in disadvantaged communities and for pregnant women, through direct financial support to families, through the provision of additional resources to schools, and through measures to facilitate learning and to encourage students to stay in school. We must help make it easier for young people to make the transition to adult life and to become productive members of society through services that are better adapted to their situation.

In response to this need, new measures were implemented in Year Two of the action plan, while others begin where previous initiatives left off. First is introduction of a youth action strategy that proposes measures aimed at improving the success and well-being of young people. Three of the strategy's measures are part of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion: Alternative jeunesse program, Qualification des jeunes project, and greater continuity and meshing of youth services. New resources were added as well, especially within schools, to help students experiencing difficulty. The Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon kept up its work to prevent child poverty. Lastly, a number of other preventive courses of action under the responsibility of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux continued.

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

- **Family support as of pregnancy**

We all know that poverty has adverse effects on child development and social adaptation. However, premature parenthood is also a factor that increases the risk of behavioural problems and developmental delay in children.

The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux's Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services are aimed at countering the negative impact of these situations. The Services consist of two components: Support for young parents, and Support for families living in extreme poverty.

The Services are especially intended for:

- pregnant women whose projected delivery date is before their 20th birthday; mothers under 20 years old at the time of application; and fathers and children under 5 years old living in extreme poverty
- pregnant women and mothers aged 20 and over, and fathers and children under 5 years old living in extreme poverty.

For Support for young parents, the regional average for the share of the target group (mothers under 20 years and their family) reached is 88%. By 2010, it will be 90%. A recurrent budget of \$22 million was initially invested in this component. The Services were also designated as a priority in the investments announced in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.

This component also includes a financial support measure for pregnant minors developed by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. Destitute pregnant minors who are part of the Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services program are eligible for this pilot project. In April

2006, 691 young women received financial support of \$1.8 million. The results of a study conducted in 2006 will enable the government to determine whether the measure should be renewed.

For the Support for families living in extreme poverty component, 61% of the pregnant women and under-educated mothers at least 20 years old living below the poverty line received the Services between April 1, 2004, and March 31, 2005. By 2010, 75% of the target clientele should have been reached. The estimate for the amounts spent on this component and its implementation regionally and locally in 2005-2006 is \$22 million, with allocations going to health and social services agencies.

- **A stimulating environment for very young children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

Young children under disadvantaged circumstances or from vulnerable families often go without the conditions critical to their development. To remedy lack of stimulation or prevent developmental delay, there is an agreement that gives these children access to places in regulated childcare services.

The purpose of this framework agreement signed by early childhood centres, the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux is to facilitate access to early childhood centres (CPE) for children whose family has been referred by a local community service centre (CLSC). Since April 1, 2005, similar agreements have also been signed with daycare centres and health and social services centres (CLSC component). Coordinating offices, instituted on June 1, 2006, can also sign agreements with home daycare operations.

In 2005-2006, the equivalent of 461 full-time places was thus reserved, with the equivalent of 328 places taken by children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The preliminary estimate for program expenditures is \$1.14 million for 2005-2006. An evaluation report is slated to be tabled in the autumn of 2006.

- **Support for prevention activities for young children**

A five-year, \$10 million agreement was sealed between the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon in order to support various poverty-prevention initiatives for young children.

The main goal of the Centre premier berceau, the first project funded under the agreement, is rapid intervention with young would-be, first-time mothers and families in impoverished districts. The project is managed by a not-for-profit organization, Autonomie Jeunes Familles, with a board of directors composed of three government representatives and five members of the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon.

The first target territories are those covered by the six CLSCs in east-end Montréal. The program, up and running since June 2005, expects to include 50 new families a year for three years. The services offered are individual, couple and family therapy, ongoing medical attention during pregnancy, academic assistance, psychoeducational or creation workshops, a Moms and Tots activity centre, and psychosocial support.

In May 2006, 95 families applied for admission to the Centre premier berceau and 67 were interviewed and accepted. In addition, 40 families meet with Centre staff regularly. The Centre premier berceau is also intended as a multicultural centre that incorporates the project to support young immigrant parents. Lastly, a project for young Native parents who have experienced trauma will be developed in the coming year.

- **Preparing young children for school**

It is common knowledge that young people who have been exposed to reading and writing activities, whether at home or at daycare, learn to read more easily and score better grades in math. We also know that learning is easier for children whose parents use positive practices.

Parent training and awareness-raising create a family environment conducive to overall child development and emergent literacy. This is why it is important to instil a love of reading in children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods as early as possible and to get them involved in activities that whet their appetite for reading and writing. This is the goal of the Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities.

Answering to the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, this program provides support for joint projects in the 17 administrative regions of Québec. Ultimately, the idea is to have the public and community organizations working with children 5 years old and younger in impoverished neighbourhoods integrate sustainable emergent literacy activities within their mission and programming for this target population.

The program supports some 51 projects across Québec. More than 1,400 emergent literacy activities are carried out with parents and their children aged 5 and under, as well as with organizations. In 2006-2007, there will be eight new projects. Each administrative region receives an annual budget of \$40,000 for backing local projects in target zones. In 2006-2007, the total budget remained stable. Lastly, a research team will be formed in the autumn of 2006 to evaluate the results of the program.

- **Academic success of elementary level students in disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the disparity in academic success with other communities often means that a portion of the population has trouble entering the workforce because of poor health and a feeling of social and economic exclusion. This difference persists because the problems associated with poverty are propagated from generation to generation. To narrow this gap and ensure that, over time, academic success is secured and the graduation rate increased in these communities, action for and with families, children and schools must be taken. The goal and challenge of the Programme famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble trial tested by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport since 2003 is to create a genuine school community in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The four-year program ends in 2007. The 12 participating school boards are each allotted \$60,000 a year for implementing it. In 2005-2006, 6,299 students in 25 schools in disadvantaged communities and 12 adult education centres were reached.

Examples of activities offered under the program:

- The active participation of parents within the school, for instance, by having a special day for showcasing their skills.
- Childcare services for the parents of young children so that the parents are encouraged to go back to school. The service is offered only during class hours and young parents are given customized training (local employment centre, health centre, family agency, youth centre).

In the coming year, different measures will be used to evaluate the results of the program and determine what comes next.

- **Increase student motivation and success**

The Homework Assistance and Healthy Schools programs managed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport are geared towards student motivation and success.

The Homework Assistance program is aimed at bolstering the homework assistance needed in order for elementary-level students to remain interested in school, to rally the school community to the cause, and to stimulate local initiatives in finding formats tailored to each school community. The purpose of the Healthy Schools program is to educate Cycle Three elementary school and Cycle One secondary school students in healthy lifestyle habits, including regular physical activity and proper nutrition.

All schools are eligible for the programs and in 2005-2006, every Québec school board participated. Total disbursements for the Homework Assistance and Healthy Schools programs were \$19.6 million and \$4.9 million respectively. The budget for the former doubled in 2005-2006, from \$9.4 million to \$19.6 million.

Examples of activities offered under the Homework Assistance program:

- Twice a week, students considered at serious risk of academic failure and who do not receive adequate assistance and supervision for homework stay after school and are given help with it.
- Parents and their children attend sessions aimed at helping the parents develop support skills, strengthening school-family ties, enhancing student motivation for learning, teaching students proper work methods, and instilling the value of perseverance in students. Special attention is given to students in difficulty. Schools decide whether to offer the service at lunch time or after school.

Examples of activities offered under the Healthy Schools program:

- Two Circus workshop practices a week held in the school gymnasium.
- Formation of hockey, handball or basketball teams. The activities are given at lunch time or after school.

- **Support for students in difficulty through additional staff**

In the education sector, certain measures are intended to enhance the support offered to children at school in order to foster their development, feeling of belonging, and academic success. These measures make it possible to provide children in academic difficulty with special support. This extra guidance and supervision during and after school also gives parents more quality time with their children.

This is why \$20 million was made available to school boards for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 to hire professional staff and support staff whose role it is to support the children, parents and teaching staff. Another purpose of the measure is to enable early screening of children with difficulties and to provide appropriate monitoring and follow-up.

The agreement in principle entered into on December 15, 2005, between teaching staff and the government provides for allocations worth \$90 million for additional staff for students in difficulty starting in 2006-2007 and ending in 2008-2009. This three-year funding will be distributed as follows:

\$30 million for hiring remedial teachers for elementary-level students with learning disabilities

\$30 million for hiring resource teachers for the secondary level, primarily for students with behavioural problems

\$30 million to hire or keep professional staff and support staff.

Lastly, the government has contributed \$3.5 million for additional staff to support teachers working with mixed-level groups and \$5 million for the professional development of teachers, one portion of which is earmarked for skills upgrading in the area of school adjustment. Furthermore, \$3 million has also been cleared for increasing the number of pedagogical hours for adult education teachers.

This adds up to an extra \$121.5 million since 2004 in support for students in difficulty.

- **More generous financial assistance for children**

Instituted in January 2005, the refundable Child Assistance tax credit is aimed at better supporting families financially, and, in turn, helping to reduce and prevent poverty. Child Assistance is universal and, for low- and middle-income families, more generous than the former Family Allowance, nonrefundable tax credit for dependent children, and tax cuts for families.

For the 2005 calendar year, nearly \$2 billion in all was paid out under the refundable Child Assistance tax credit, an increase of \$550 million over 2004 amounts under the previous system. The average annual benefit for households was \$2312 and \$3176 for families with income of less than \$25,000.

In January 2006, the credit was indexed by 2.43%. For example, the basic benefit amount for the oldest child in a single-parent family, which was \$2700 in 2005, was indexed to \$2766 for 2006. At the same time, the cut-off line for reduction of Child Assistance was raised in order to preserve integration of this new credit with that of the Work Premium.

The following table shows the difference in the financial assistance granted to a single-parent family with one child in 2006 and assistance prior to Child Assistance.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY WITH ONE CHILD			
Net family income	2004 system ³	New system (2006) Child Assistance	Gains
\$0	\$1925	\$2766	\$841
\$5000	\$1925	\$2766	\$841
\$10,000	\$1925	\$2766	\$841
\$15,000	\$2262	\$2766	\$504
\$20,000	\$1428	\$2766	\$1338
\$25,000	\$2017	\$2766	\$749
\$30,000	\$2033	\$2766	\$733

- **Improved support for families with children with a disability**

A non income-based supplement is added to Child Assistance benefits when a child is disabled. On January 1, 2006, the monthly supplement for a child with a disability rose from \$121 to \$161.50, an increase of \$486 a year. The supplement will be indexed automatically each year.

3. Family Allowance, non-refundable tax credit for dependent children, and tax cuts for families

ACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Greater continuity and meshing of youth services**

Youth intervention teams were formed in 2003-2004 for young people and children with complex and multiple problems. Their mission is to systematize a formal and structured partnership among the various providers of services to children and youth. The teams are headed by a coordinator who oversees liaison officers in every establishment that offers services to children and youth (health and social service centres, youth centres, rehabilitation centres for intellectually and physically impaired clients and for clients with addictions, child psychiatry services, schools, early childhood centres, etc.).

In 2005-2006, \$2.4 million was allocated for training and maintaining the intervention teams so that they cover the health and social service centre territories in every region of Québec. As at March 31, 2006, all youth intervention teams were operational. An evaluation report will be released in the autumn of 2006.

- **Training and support and guidance services for young drop-outs and undereducated 16- to 24-year-olds**

One of the measures introduced to enable more Quebecers to get a basic education is the adult education and professional development action plan for training and support and guidance services tailored to the situation and needs of young drop-outs and undereducated 16- to 24-year-olds.

These services vary according to the needs and characteristics of the people in this age group who have no secondary school diploma (secondary school vocational diploma and secondary school diploma). The profile of this group varies widely. For example, the young people may be working full time, receiving employment insurance or employment assistance, or without a source of income, or may be living with their parents. Some are parents themselves and others are homeless.

The services offered under this program are intended to enable young people to get a secondary school diploma enabling them to further their education or move towards becoming a stable and contributing member of society and the labour market. The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport is responsible for the program, which is included with the measures built into the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy.

On the local level, the program is implemented by a team composed of school board (general education, Youth and Adult section, professional development), local employment centre, youth centre, social service centre, and Forum Jeunesse representatives, and representatives of businesses and organizations such as carrefours jeunesse-emploi and external manpower resources. This team has produced a common action plan for 2005 to 2007 and ensures implementation of the intended activities and service continuity. Currently there are 24 local teams that bring together nearly 300 organizations. In March 2006, 22 action plans had been submitted.

The plans feature nearly 800 activities under local team supervision. In 2005-2006, the total budget for the program was \$2 million, divided among Québec's 17 administrative regions and among 20 school boards. The program evaluation report will be tabled in the autumn of 2006.

- **Intervention strategy for disadvantaged communities**

The New Approaches, New Solutions intervention strategy targets select secondary schools whose students are from the most disadvantaged communities. This five-year program is designed to enable each of these schools to institute measures for fostering student success adapted to its needs. The schools were identified using a school population map and a deprivation index rate based on mothers' level of education or lack

thereof, and parents' labour market activity or lack thereof. One hundred ninety two schools from 55 school boards were chosen, for a total of 113,971 students.

As at January 30, 2006, 93% of the secondary schools targeted under this measure had established a protocol for planning, monitoring and readjusting intervention based on an analysis of their community.

Investments of \$25 million a year for the period from 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 were thus approved. Year Five (2006-2007) of the five-year plan is coming up. Québec's steering committee is currently examining the future of this strategy.

- **Alternatives to employment assistance for people under 25 years old**

Young employment-assistance recipients must be encouraged to carry out activities that enable them to obtain or regain personal, social and occupational self-sufficiency. This is precisely the objective of the Alternative jeunesse projects that have been progressively introduced since May 2006 and that are one of the core measures of the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy.

In exchange for a commitment to begin steps to achieve social and occupational integration, Alternative jeunesse program participants are entitled to financial assistance in the form of a youth allowance equivalent to the basic employment-assistance benefit, to which \$30 a week may be added for their participation in employability assistance measures. Before the program comes into effect, it is being tested in nine local employment centres (May 2006 to April 2007). The budget for these pilot projects is \$7.2 million. The positive experiences of local monitoring committees under the Solidarité jeunesse program and the flexibility of Emploi-Québec's slate of services can be put to profitable use as part of the pilot projects.

- **Giving young people qualifications**

To better help young people experiencing particular difficulties make the transition to adult life, they must have an array of coherent and seamless services.

The Qualification des jeunes project is aimed precisely at helping the young people in youth centres become qualified and move towards self-sufficiency. In 2005-2006, the project was continued thanks to financial assistance from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. In 2006-2007 it became part of the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy presented by the Premier on March 29, 2006. The project now has the status of a program and has been extended to include all youth centres and their clientele of young people aged 16 and over who need special help with planning their future.

Youth centre workers assigned to the program provide guidance and supervision for three years of the person's residence in the youth centre and one year after. By the end of the program's three-year life span, the government outlay will have been \$6.6 million.

- **Towards seamless services for undereducated or jobless 16-to-24 year-olds**

To ensure more service continuity and to prevent young undereducated or jobless people from becoming disheartened and left to their own devices, there must be better dovetailing of action. Engagement jeunesse pursues this goal by offering better guidance and coaching geared to job qualification and entry for young people.

The 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy will be used as a template for developing Engagement jeunesse. The strategy has five major thrusts for supporting young people as they work actively towards success. They will serve as guideposts for government action for the next three years.

One of these thrusts is to adapt services to the diverse experiences of reality of young people. For example, the Québec pluriel program, which facilitates the social occupational

integration of 16-to-35 year-olds from cultural communities and 16-to-24 year-olds from visible minorities, will be extended to new territories. With Engagement jeunesse, this clientele can access certain services more easily, move more smoothly from one government measure or program to another, and have better guidance and support in this process.

More specifically, under Engagement jeunesse, there will be more cohesion and better meshing by:

- establishing a support and guidance think tank aimed at helping 16-to-24 year olds with particular difficulties
- implementation of Qualification des jeunes program in all youth centres
- deployment of the Québec pluriel program in four new territories
- strengthening of efforts in planning the transition of young people with disabilities from school to active living and the labour market.

The Secrétariat à la jeunesse coordinates this undertaking that will require investments of \$3.5 million over the next three years.

ACTION FOR SENIORS

- **Support social and community projects that foster the social and civic participation of seniors**

The problems that affect seniors in particular, such as shaky financial resources and physical limitations, can lead to their isolation and social exclusion. To remedy this situation, many community organizations are prepared to have innovative one-time activities so long as they are given funding to do so.

The purpose of the Committed to action on behalf of Québec seniors program is to support innovative one-time community projects for seniors. The program, which debuted in 2001 as part of the Québec et ses aînés : engagés dans l'action 2001-2004 action plan, was extended in 2005 by the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine and given a budget of \$900,000.

To foster joint action and synergy, promoter organizations can present joint projects or work with other partner organizations whose mandate is consistent with the program's general objective and with at least one specific objective.

Regional steering committees on seniors define the priorities that the various promoter organizations can use to design the proposals they wish to submit. In 2005-2006, 68 innovative projects were carried out thanks to the grants of up to \$25,000 per organization awarded in every region of Québec.

2.3 Foster the involvement of society as a whole

The success of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion hinges to a large extent on the ongoing efforts and commitment of all sectors and segments of society and on the synchronized support of the government. In Year Two, the government continued its work and action begun in 2004 to develop an integrated territorial approach.

INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL APPROACH AND THE FONDS QUÉBÉCOIS D'INITIATIVES SOCIALES

With its integrated territorial approach, the government has engaged the enemy on another front, namely, the fight against deep-rooted poverty in specific communities, cities and regions. This approach assumes that the communities concerned make this fight their own, exercise leadership, put together their own strategy and determine their priorities. It also implies that government bodies and the different partners provide support to these local and regional initiatives by, when necessary, acting as a moderator with local authorities.

In Montréal, the City Contract signed with the government reaffirms and officializes municipal-provincial cooperation in order to support local initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion. Under this agreement, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions has committed to extending the Programme de renouveau urbain et villageois until December 31, 2006. A budget allowance of \$32 million was therefore given to the City of Montréal for joint management of the program. Furthermore, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions and the City of Montréal have pledged to concentrate 75% of program monies in the intervention zones deemed to be priorities. In keeping with the integrated territorial approach, the production of intervention plans was entrusted to the boroughs.

In the borough of Ville-Marie, the Programme de renouveau urbain et villageois made it possible to acquire and renovate the buildings adjacent to the Old Brewery Mission to house community services and rooms for the homeless.

Several investments were also committed in various boroughs under Opération solidarité 5000 logements, including a project to build 32 housing units for Sud-Ouest seniors.

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales, instituted pursuant to the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, provides support for the participation and involvement of local instances. Multiyear agreements with two RCMs (La Haute-Gaspésie and Témiscouata) and the City of Montréal (22 boroughs) made it possible to back nearly 250 projects (social integration of young people, drop-out prevention, social and occupational integration, support for families and young children, food security, companionship and public transit, universal access, etc.). The Fonds contribution in 2005-2006 to the projects stemming from these agreements is \$5.5 million. All of these projects are the result of local action plans aimed at improving the living conditions of people in situations of poverty.

In the case of the agreement with the City of Montréal, over 400 partners from sectors such as health, education and employment worked together to pool efforts and make choices. The synergy thus created, along with the amounts laid out by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (\$5 million), has spelled significant leverage. For every dollar given to the City of Montréal to combat poverty and social exclusion sociale, matched funding of \$1.36 is provided by various Montréal partners. In addition to this are sizable indirect contributions in the form of volunteer work, premises and equipment loaned, and support and advice, for example.

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales is also empowered to establish partnerships between the business community, the public sector and associations that assist persons in impoverished neighbourhoods. In the first two years of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, public-private partnership agreements were signed,

notably with the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec (\$4 million over two years) and with ten community organizations across the land base of the City of Sherbrooke and the RCM of Estrie (nearly \$1 million over three years) to deal more effectively with the problem of hunger, and with the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, that helps young children succeed in school and their parents (\$10 million over five years).

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales is currently backing a pilot project for testing an innovative and more comprehensive approach in the social and occupational integration of persons who have been away from the labour market for a long time. A Trois-Rivières community organization that specializes in social and occupational integration has been chosen for this 27-month experiment with a budget of \$0.75 million known as *Emploi de solidarité*.

2.4 Ensure consistent and coherent action

Coherent action, whether provincial or local, is critical to the effectiveness of the action plan. The Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, formed of representatives of nine government departments and agencies, has the specific mandate of ensuring coherent public policy. The committee met several times from September 2005 to June 2006.

INFORM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE OR REGULATORY PROPOSALS ON THE INCOME OF PERSONS IN SITUATIONS OF POVERTY

The government must be informed of the impact that draft legislation may have on the income of individuals and families in situations of poverty. This is why section 20 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* stipulates that "each minister shall, if he or she considers that proposals of a legislative or regulatory nature could have direct and significant impacts on the incomes of persons or families who...are living in poverty, shall, when presenting the proposals to the Government, give an account of the impacts he or she foresees." Where applicable, these impact statements must be appended to the briefs tabled with the Conseil des ministres.

STEP UP AGREEMENTS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Canada-Québec agreement on pilot projects for older workers expired in 2006. Centered on the application of approaches proven positive in the past, the agreement made it possible for more than 600 workers to take part in 16 new projects that helped prolong their work life and fostered their labour market re-entry.

Alongside this agreement, discussions were stepped up with the federal government in the aftermath of the creation in September 2005 of a task force for finding more lasting solutions to the problem of support for workers aged 55 and over. In July 2006, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale examined a new proposal from the federal government. Discussions on introduction of a permanent program for this category of worker are ongoing.

The Canada-Québec agreement on the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, entered into for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, was renewed for 2006-2007. In addition, at a meeting in October, federal, provincial and territorial ministers recognized persons with a disability as a priority for the coming years and commissioned a task force to continue analyzing the two options for income support measures for this segment of society.

ADAPT ACTIONS TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST NATIONS

Further to the discussions between the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, an agreement was signed in December 2005. Its purpose is to work with Native communities, in keeping with their culture, to craft and introduce means of combating poverty and social exclusion. The social development office of the health and social services commission of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador was tasked to produce an action plan adapted to Native peoples.

The first phase, a study by an organization commissioned by the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador, determined that the poverty in Native communities was largely associated with social exclusion, that is, exclusion of Natives by non-Natives, and the tendency of Natives to marginalize themselves. The study recommends a structure for facilitating the joint action of everyone engaged in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The results of the study have served as guideposts for the next phases, namely, creation of an action steering committee for each Nation; a Native anti-poverty foundation; and developmental projects. The study and the subsequent phases are steps in the production of an action plan covered in full (\$74,000) by the Fonds d'aide à l'innovation et à l'expérimentation of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale.

3. OUTLOOKS

The action plan spans five years. In the third year and subsequent years, the focus will be on branching out from existing measures and on supplementary programs, investments or actions that contribute to the achievement of Québec's goals to reduce poverty and social exclusion.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the creation of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, action plan dynamics will be enhanced, bolstered primarily by the participation of researchers and people who have experienced poverty first-hand.

COMITÉ CONSULTATIF WORK PLAN

In the autumn of 2006, the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion Sociale will release its strategic plan for the next three years. A number of courses of action are slated for 2006-2007.

From now to October 2006, when the first Socioeconomic Forum of the First Nations of Québec will be held, the Comité consultatif will keep abreast of the discussions between the First Nations and the Government of Québec in order to ensure that the fight against poverty and social exclusion, crucial to the development of Native communities, is at the heart of this important event. The Comité consultatif also plans, as of the autumn of 2006, to hold consultations with low-income groups on the means for cushioning the impact of the overall rise in the cost of living on their quality of life. In January 2007, the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale will give its opinion on updating of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion and its implementation, and propose the measures it deems most effective for attaining the objectives established under the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*.

In addition to these foremost concerns, the Comité consultatif intends to fully exercise its role of advising and keeping watch by intervening at parliamentary commissions on draft legislation with a significant impact on the living conditions of people in situations of poverty and social exclusion as the need arises. It will also continue to forge partnerships with all the stakeholders concerned with poverty and social exclusion.

CENTRE D'ÉTUDE SUR LA PAUVRETÉ ET L'EXCLUSION

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, with the collaboration of the Comité consultatif, will table a series of poverty and social exclusion indicators which the Minister will make public and the Centre follow up on. These indicators will be used to analyze the impact of draft legislation on incomes of individuals and households in situations of poverty, as prescribed in section 20 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. They will replace the temporary indicators currently used in applying this section. They will also be used to keep track of the progress made under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

In April 2006, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, along with the partner government departments and agencies, including the Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture, invited the scientific community to submit proposals for research on poverty and social exclusion. The research must contribute to the knowledge base on the phenomenon of poverty and social exclusion by:

- 1: Enriching, structuring and disseminating knowledge on the dynamics of poverty and its consequences from a number of angles, such as poverty and health, poverty and work, poverty and place, and poverty and education.

- 2 : Critical and comparative analysis of anti-poverty programs and policy in Québec and elsewhere in Canada and abroad.
- 3: Taking stock of, analyzing and assessing the various results-centered development initiatives in local and regional communities, taking into account the social and economic development likely to fit in with a broader framework for sustainable development.

The selected research projects will get under way in January 2007. The new knowledge thus acquired should make it possible to provide a better understanding of the full breadth of poverty, accurately assess the repercussions for individuals, society and the economy, and craft innovative and more effective anti-poverty approaches.

Lastly, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is working in tandem with the Conseil de la science et de la technologie to produce a research and knowledge-transfer strategy aimed at novel action for combating poverty and its causes, chronic enablement, and consequences.

MOVING TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL APPROACH

To maximize the spin-offs aimed at improving the living conditions of the most impoverished individuals and communities, local strategies against poverty and social exclusion designed by the very people concerned and the government departments (interdepartmental synergy) and agencies involved will be launched or continued as part of the systematic deployment of an integrated territorial approach. This move will factor in the financial means of every regional and local player concerned. The Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale will therefore continue its work to implement and deploy the integrated territorial approach.

Working with the various government departments and the Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale will step up its prospecting of financial partnerships with the federal government and municipal administrations, private businesses and institutions, and foundations. These monies will provide the targeted communities with a more sustained and secure base for their social and economic development, while helping the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales play a more effective role as a catalyst and lever for pooling the resources of the different players.

The work to deploy the integrated territorial approach is slated to be carried out with the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions under a future territorial development policy. The policy is in response to the feedback from local and regional stakeholders at the The Public Talks Town Hall Meetings held in the summer of 2004 in every region of Québec and the Forum des générations in October 2004. These concerns focus mainly on the need for greater decision-making power for the regions and government action that is more flexible and better adapted to regional characteristics. The territorial development policy will be presented in the autumn of 2006.

TOWARDS AN ANTI-RACISM AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

In order to produce and establish a government anti-racism and anti-discrimination policy, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles will conduct consultations in the autumn of 2006. This process is consistent with government action in recent years to facilitate the integration and full participation within Québec society of citizens of every origin by ensuring one and all equal opportunity and respect for differences.

The consultation document entitled *For the full participation of Quebecers from cultural communities* presents a brief overview of the Québec situation as regards discrimination and racism, the main measures instituted, and the strategic thrusts and choices proposed with a view to drafting the government policy.

INTERSECTORAL EVALUATION

The Comité interministériel d'évaluation, composed of the main government departments and agencies involved in the action plan, has begun its evaluation work. Its role is to glean the results obtained further to implementing the different measures of the action plan, based on cross-sectional analysis. The idea is to use the report as input for the comprehensive report to be submitted to the government after Year Five of implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The action plan addresses complex issues and so assessing its effectiveness is no easy task. Determining whether the action plan has been successful in reducing poverty is not limited to measuring the trends that apply to a general poverty indicator. The results and levels that constitute success must be defined. Evaluation will make it possible to link the specific objectives of each of the measures to the thrusts of the action plan and to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the extent to which the master objectives of the plan have been achieved and the stages reached in decreasing poverty and social exclusion.

Several of the measures of the action plan come with an evaluation framework produced by the government departments and agencies responsible for these measures. These frameworks define evaluation objectives and methodology and the timetable envisioned. Other measures call for the collection of operational results or reports, for example, on the budgets allocated, the number of people reached, or the number of housing units built. The evaluation frameworks have been shown to have many points in common in terms of quantitative or qualitative analysis and the expected results.

The committee will go on to examine the evaluation results for each of the measures of the action plan individually based on the reports produced. It will then proceed with cross-sectional analysis with a view to an overall portrait of the common or convergent elements of the measures, the factors that led to these results, the main success factors and, conversely, the deterrents. Additional data collection may be required after the first analyses in order to concentrate more narrowly on priorities, notably with those responsible for the measures within the government departments and agencies the most directly concerned with the action plan.

TOWARDS THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY AND BETTER SUPPORT FOR THEIR FAMILY

Persons with disabilities face obstacles that make social integration and financial self-sufficiency particularly difficult. This is why application of the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* can also contribute to achieving the goals of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*.

In 2004 the Government of Québec took a giant leap forward when it amended the legislation aimed at the full integration of persons with disabilities within Québec society, thereby giving fresh momentum to government action on their behalf. This statute features greater participation of government departments and networks, municipalities and public and private organizations in order to improve the integration of persons with disabilities, at par with all Québec citizens.

The Office des personnes handicapées du Québec was therefore given the mandate to rigorously monitor application of the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* and to advise all the government departments and networks, municipalities and public and private organizations concerned. The Office was also entrusted with working with the partners concerned to update the *À part... égale* policy.

Updating of the *À part... égale* policy is currently underway. It involves producing a profile of the social participation of persons with disabilities in Québec, proposed targets to be reached, and common goals to pursue to eliminate persistent obstacles. Mechanisms will also be put in place for overseeing implementation of the proposed government policy entitled *À parts égales, levons les obstacles* and for evaluating how the social participation of persons with disabilities in Québec is faring under it.

The deadline for this update is December 2007. *À parts égales, levons les obstacles* will give government departments and networks, municipalities and public and private organizations a refurbished frame of reference for, among other things, producing the annual action plans mandatory for government departments and agencies with 50 employees or more, or municipalities with 15,000 inhabitants or more.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE ACT

The purpose of the draft *regulation respecting individual and family assistance* is to determine how the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*, assented to in June 2005, will be applied. The proposed amendments will enable support for the disadvantaged members of society in their steps to achieve or maintain personal and social self-sufficiency.

The draft regulation will also, as of January 2007, enable the Social Assistance Program for households capable of working and the Social Solidarity Program for people with severely limited capacity for employment and their family. These programs will replace the Employment-Assistance Program.

The new Act will also make it possible, as of April 1, 2007, to institute the Alternative jeunesse program for people under 25 years old and the creation of specific financial assistance programs designed to meet the special needs of certain kinds of individuals or families. This means that the income security system will be more flexible and, in turn, ensure a tighter fit between Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale services and the needs of the groups concerned.

For example, the government plans to invest \$5.8 million in a measure to encourage recipients to enter the workforce without losing their eligibility for dental care and prescription drug coverage for a period of six months after they no longer receive last resort assistance. As of April 1, 2007, more than 34,000 households a year will have access to this measure to support work and acknowledge its value.

In addition, the rules governing assessment of personal resources under the last resort assistance program will be relaxed, thus improving the income of a number of recipients. For example, since an automobile is often the only means of transportation for the people in outlying regions, a necessity when looking for a job and a prerequisite for employment, the exclusion applied to the retail value of an automobile will rise from \$5000 to \$10,000 as of January 1, 2007. When the exclusion for the net value of a residence, which came into force in September 2006, and the above incentive are combined, these exclusions or other mechanisms represent a total outlay of \$12.3 million a year.

POVERTY IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES

The Aboriginal Nations of Québec and Labrador will use the Socioeconomic Forum of the First Nations held October 25 to 27, 2006, as an opportunity to launch and secure support for a series of actions and measures empowering them to improve their economic and social environment in a genuine, effective and viable fashion.

In view of organizing the Forum, the economic development commission of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador created the Socioeconomic Forum of the First Nations Secretariat through the financial support of the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones. Five specific objectives were defined:

- Gather all the parties involved in the question of the social and economic development of the First Nations
- Clarify and expand on the issues related to the development of the First Nations
- Develop proposals and define in real terms the action needed for improving the social and economic situation of the First Nations
- Establish momentum and a structure for speedy implementation and effective monitoring of the proposals and actions
- Forge and maintain harmonious and respectful relations.

The Forum reflects Native concerns in matters of economic and social development and poverty and social exclusion. This far-reaching event will bring sharply into focus the issues and genuine solutions that will engage the First Nations and all relevant social players and will provide inspiration for the action plan that the First Nations are in the process of developing.

CONCLUSION

After the second year of implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, everything is now in place for action resolutely geared towards attaining the goals of the Act.

Clearly, the fight against poverty and social exclusion is not the unilateral responsibility of the government. The involvement of society as a whole is crucial to the success of the endeavour. The participation of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, of representatives of various sectors of society, and, of course, of citizens in priority intervention territories, in producing local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion will certainly foster this success.

Soon, evaluation report results will make it possible to determine whether the measures have enabled targets to be met or need fine-tuning or improvement or if, on the other hand, these public resources would be better spent elsewhere. The poverty indicators approved by the Minister will enable a number of factors to be measured, including the progress made under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Granted, much remains to be done to make Québec one of the industrialized states with the least number of poor, but the steps taken since passage of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* attest to the government's unflinching will to stay the course. All that has come before by way of government action, braced by the action of society as a whole, is a guarantee that future work will be indeed rigorous.